

Connecticut Horticultural Society

NEWSLETTER

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Wildly delicious: Shagbark Hickory nuts are one of Russ Cohen's favorite edibles

By Russ Cohen, *naturalist and wild foods enthusiast*

CT Hort is thrilled to be hosting Russ Cohen on Thursday, April 20 at 7:30 pm at Emanuel Synagogue in West Hartford. Go to page 3 to learn more about his presentation.

A close up of Shagbark Hickory nuts on the tree.

Shagbark Hickory (*Carya ovata*) trees are a familiar sight along many along rural roads and field edges over much of New England, as well as further south and west. They are recognizable year-round due to their tell-tale bark. Although other trees (such as Silver Maple, *Acer saccharinum*) have shaggy bark, none are as dramatically so as *C. ovata*. The pieces of bark typically peel off in vertical strips over a foot long, pulling away from the trunk up to several inches at each end. (That said: it should be noted that the shagbark hickory's bark is light grey and smooth when the tree is young; the shagginess develops as the tree's trunk exceeds 4-5 inches in diameter.) Shagbark Hickory's compound leaves are composed of five leaflets; the two inner ones noticeably smaller than the outer three. They are typically large trees, over 60 feet tall, with trunks a foot or more in diameter. Although several other species of smoother-barked hickories (such as the Pignut, *Carya glabra*) can be found in this region, I tend to ignore them. Their nuts tend to be smaller and less reliably tasty than that of the Shagbark. In addition, trees of the other hickory species tend to be less conspicuous than *C. ovata*.

Apart from the trees' distinctive, peeling bark pieces (under which bats are known to roost), its attractive, deep-yellow fall foliage, and the utility of its wood for tool handles, heating, and smoking, *Carya ovata's* most appealing trait is the deliciousness

of its nuts. Some people (including me) are of the opinion that no tastier nut is produced by a native species of this (or perhaps any) region. I describe the flavor of Shagbark Hickories as that of store-bought walnuts that have been lightly sprayed with Maple syrup. They are quite good eaten raw right out of the shell, but are even better when lightly toasted or incorporated into baked goods. Indeed, hickory nuts' fine flavor makes them a superior substitute for Walnuts or Pecans in almost any recipe calling for them. I make a Maple-Hickory Nut Pie (the recipe is on p. 53 of my book, *Wild Plants I Have Known...and Eaten*) that everyone I've served it to prefer over pecan pie, as its flavor is richer and less cloying. For a recipe that is more suited to larger groups than can comfortably share a pie, you might want to try my Hickory Nut Wafer Cookies; the recipe is posted at <http://users.rcn.com/eatwild/recipes.html>.

While it is not that hard to grow *Carya ovata* trees from seed, it takes a long time (20 years or more) for a seed-grown tree to grow large enough to produce good-sized nut crops of its own. So, assuming you don't want to wait that long, here's some tips on when, where and how to gather nuts from existing trees. Good-sized Shagbark Hickory trees producing collectible quantities of nuts are quite common in Connecticut.

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President's Letter

Lots of news to share

Dear Fellow Gardeners,

Kevin Wilcox's workshop last month taught us how to graft a conifer cutting onto a seedling of similar species. I was among the 15 participants, and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Two grafts later, I am anxious to see if they take!

Our speaker Nancy Stevens had a cornucopia of wonderful information on gardens in Scotland. Hopefully you were able to tune in live or see the recording afterwards. I loved how Nancy had a snippet of the map of Scotland on each slide to give us a location reference.

We will be back together in person for Russ Cohen's program on April 20 at the Synagogue in West Hartford. We'll learn about native edibles, and even get to sample some! At this meeting we will celebrate significant Membership Anniversary Milestones. Join us for (non-native, haha) cake!

Our biggest fundraiser for the scholarships we fund at UConn and NVCC happens on May 5 at our annual Plant Auction. Read more about the Auction on page 6. And remember, scholarship donations can always be made on our website by clicking the donate button.

In other outreach news, our CT Hort Cares grant program for civic projects launched last month and, at press time, we have already received six applications. It will be exciting to see where we will make other impacts in our great state of Connecticut.

Grateful for all of You,
Cheryl

Thank you to our generous business members and supporters!

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Nibbling on Natives in Your Back Yard and Beyond

with Russ Cohen

Thursday, April 20, 2023 • 7:30 pm

Emanuel Synagogue, 160 Mohegan Drive, West Hartford and via Zoom (you'll be sent the link on the Sunday before the talk).

Join Russ Cohen, expert forager and author of *Wild Plants I Have Known...and Eaten*, for a slide show featuring at least two dozen species of native edible wild plants suitable for adding to your own landscape, or nibbling on as you encounter them in other locales. Keys to the identification of each species will be provided, along with edible portions, seasons of availability and preparation methods, along with guidelines for safe and environmentally responsible foraging.

Russ will also include a few details regarding some native edible plants he has grown successfully from seed, and the partnerships he has made with conservation groups and others to add edible native plants to their landscapes.

Get ready to enjoy some edibles he will be bringing to the talk!

Until his retirement in 2015, Russ Cohen served as the Rivers Advocate for the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game's Division of Ecological Restoration, where one of his areas of expertise was in riparian vegetation. Russ has a small nursery in Weston, MA where he grows/keeps more than 1,000 plants that he propagates from seed, then partners with land trusts, cities and towns, schools and colleges, state and federal agencies, organic farms, tribal groups and others to grow plants from his nursery in appropriate places on their properties.

On April 20, we go back to our in-person speaker presentations at Emanuel Synagogue with Zoom streaming. Member anniversaries are also being celebrated at our speaker presentation on April 20!

If you're celebrating a special anniversary with us this year, please join us!

May 18, 2023: Healthy Plants, Indoor and Out

Dr. Nick Goltz, the director of UConn's Plant Diagnostic Laboratory, will introduce fundamental techniques of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for the home gardener as well as tips and tricks on how to help any plants—from hardy CT natives to delicate tropical houseplants—live their best lives.

June 15, 2023: The Eye of the Beholder: Is It Messy, or an Acquired Taste?

The rewards of gardening with nature, not against it, are a fabulous mix of process and perception. Landscape designer **Edwina Von Gal** discusses why we need to change the way we garden and how to make it happen.



Speaker Feedback

After you attend a speaker meeting, please take a moment to tell us what you thought of the presenter. Your candid feedback helps us to arrange for speakers that will hold your interest. Take the six-question survey on our website – chort.org. Click on the survey icon found on any page then chose the speaker you want to rate. Thank you for your feedback.

Wildly Delicious from page 1



Russ Cohen picking black cherries, on Grape Island in 2014.

Shagbark Hickory nuts typically ripen in this region over a period of 4-6 weeks, from mid-September into the latter part of October. The quantity and quality of hickory nuts can vary considerably from tree to tree and from year to year (the trees tend to produce large nut crops on a two-to-three-year cycle). Look for trees in sunny spots along the edges of fields or country roads, as these will tend to bear more and bigger nuts than hickories shaded by other trees.

Shagbark Hickory nut meats are enclosed in a smooth, light tan shell about an inch long that is itself covered by a spherical, shiny-green, four-parted husk about two inches in diameter. The nuts usually don't fall off the tree until they're ripe (i.e., there's no need to pick them directly off the tree beforehand). The four-parted husk typically splits away from the shell (or is easily pulled off by hand) after the nuts have hit the ground. Occasionally, however, windstorms or squirrels will knock the nuts down before they're fully ripe, and the green husk will be impossible to pry off the shell. In that case, you can allow the nuts to ripen in their husks by storing them in your screened porch or garage (take care to see that they're not getting moldy). After several weeks, you should be able to easily remove the husks (they may have turned black in the meantime). Actually, all nuts, husk or no husk, which you intend to eat, benefit by being "cured": i.e., allowed to dry out thoroughly for at least a month before opening them. Dried-out nuts separate from the shell better than freshly-gathered ones. Be sure, though, to protect the nuts from marauding critters while they are drying; I cure and store all the nuts I have gathered for eating in large, stainless-steel mesh bags with velcro enclosures.

Although considerably thicker than those of their southern relative, the pecan, Shagbark Hickory nut shells can still be cracked open by a sturdy conventional nutcracker. I prefer to use a hammer, however, and I've noticed that if you tip each nut up on its narrow, non-pointy side, and then tap the nut with the hammer just hard enough to send cracks through the shell, you should be able to extract the nut meat in large pieces (sometimes entire halves) with a minimum of picking. Shagbark

Hickory nuts keep very well in their shells and, as long as you keep them dry and relatively cool, they should not go bad even after a year or more in storage. Once you've shelled the nuts, however, you should refrigerate or freeze those you don't use or eat within a few days.

Hickory nuts were (and, in some cases, still are) a very popular food of Native Americans. European botanists of the 17th and 18th centuries observed them crushing the shells with stones, and then putting everything (nut meats, shells and all) into mortars, where they would be mixed and pounded with water and then boiled to produce a milky soup- or gruel-like substance which they called "powcohickora" (hence the derivation of the word "hickory"). Hickories were also greatly appreciated by farm families and other rural folk, who would gather them by the bushel for their own use and for sale in produce markets, where they were a common sight as recently as the 1940s.

I can hardly imagine a better antidote to the stresses of modern life than to spend a splendid fall afternoon in the countryside on a nutting expedition with family or friends. It is but a short leap (literally as well as figuratively) from a visit to the "pick your own" apple orchard to gather your own hickory nuts as well. Shelling the nuts afterward offers similar rewards, as it makes for a relaxing cold-weather indoor activity, accompanied by a crackling fire, your favorite album or the like. It has a kind of meditative quality to it, like knitting (and with a similar satisfaction of accomplishment once you've finished).

This article draws largely upon the chapter (#11) that appears in Russ' book, Wild Plants I Have Known...and Eaten: Shagbark Hickory. Fall Foraging Fun for Friends and Families, and other sources.



Mature Shagbark Hickory trees have pieces of bark that typically peel off in vertical strips over a foot long, pulling away from the trunk up to several inches at each end.

CT Hort Plant Sale & Auction • Friday, May 5, 2023

Bethany Covenant Church, 785 Mill Street (Rt. 372), Berlin, CT

Doors open to the public at 6:30 p.m., \$5 Admission



Mark your calendar to attend this lively, fun-filled, and educational event on Friday, May 5. With growing season and Mother's Day fast-approaching, the Auction is a great spot to find just the right plant or gift. The evening begins with a plant sale while bids are accepted for unusual silent auction items and refreshments are served. Then it's on to the LIVE auction!

Horticulturist Nancy DuBrule-Clemente will once again curate the night's offerings. Our goal is to secure a broad selection of unusual perennials, annuals, vegetables & herbs, shrubs, and silent auction treasures. Nancy will be joined on the auction stage by horticulturist Kevin Wilcox, and educator and naturalist Jim Sirch. The plant knowledge these three hold could fill volumes!

Please be aware that plant donations from private gardens will no longer be accepted due to the spread of Asian jumping worms—an invasive pest that can destroy entire beds in a matter of weeks. Houseplants are acceptable. If you are a home gardener and feel you have a specimen that may be of interest, [please email the Auction Committee](#) to discuss.

Proceeds from the evening provide scholarships to Plant Science students at the University of Connecticut (since 1959), and Naugatuck Valley Community College (since 2011). In addition, funds in excess of our scholarship commitments will spill over to a new civic grants program named *CT Hort Cares* that was started this year. *Cares* grants will support plant science educational efforts in communities and schools across our state. Mini-grants of up to \$500 are available and will be distributed in mid-May.

To maximize the amount we contribute to these worthwhile efforts, we'll be charging a modest \$5 admission fee.

Please come join in the fun! For additional information or questions please email auction@chort.org.



CT Hort Cares Grant

Supporting community efforts to educate state residents on the importance of plants and the environment. The grants, totaling \$2,500, will be awarded this May. The maximum amount available per grant is \$500 and anyone who wishes to apply can do so until April 30, 2023. There are no restrictions on who can apply, but the grant must be used on a project taking place in the state of Connecticut.



To fill out an application, go to <https://bit.ly/3ZP5ujQ> or scan the QR code. Go to CTHort.org for more information.



CT Hort Travel

SAVE THE DATES:
September 7–11, 2023

Quebec's Eastern Townships Garden Tour

Join CT Hort to travel back in time and take in the old-world flavor of Québec's Eastern Townships. In the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, uncover the delights of charming French villages, lush green valleys, enchanted woods, and idyllic farmland and Victorian architecture.

Four nights at the OTL Gouverneur, a deluxe hotel in Sherbrooke • Parc Marie-Victorian in Kingsey Falls • Private tour at Glen Villa Art Garden in North Hatley • Uplands: take tea in high English tradition • Herbes Orford • Bleu Lavande • And more!

Contact Barbara at Friendship Tours to be on the list for more information when available. barbara@friendshiptours.net or 860-243-1630.

New Zealand Gardens and National Parks October 15-29

This autumn join Garden and Nature Tours, Minnesota State Horticultural Society, Friendship Tours and Southern World and traveling guide gurus C. Colston Burrell and Peter Gibbs for an unforgettable journey through the enchanting islands of New Zealand.

PRICING

Based on 20-22 Travelers

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Based on 15-19 Travelers

\$7,425.00 Land Price — Double Occupancy
\$1,275.00 Single Supplement

Fewer than 15 travelers may result in a small surcharge.
Itinerary subject to change without notice.

Call Barbara at Friendship Tours:
860-243-1630 or go to www.friendshiptours.net

2022-2023 Scholarship Fund



We hope you'll consider helping us reach our goal!

Go to cthorts.org to learn how you can give and support our mission!

Thank you!



Folks from all over the state joined horticulturnist Kevin Wilcox for his "Grafting Dwarf Conifers" workshop last month at the Noah Webster House in West Hartford.

Horticultural Happenings & Announcements

Note: Happenings are listed on a space-available basis. To submit an event, send details to news@cthorth.org.

Please format the announcement to resemble the entries below. Deadline for May issue is April 14.

Sat., April 1, 11 am: Kerry Ann Mendez presents “Time-Saving, Sustainable Maintenance Strategies for Lush Flower Gardens,” Zoom only. This lecture covers seasonal maintenance tasks, including jump-starting gardens in spring and putting them to bed in the fall. Topics include pruning; fertilizers; mulch; plant divisions; planet-friendly pest and disease practices; critter management and more. Most appropriate for gardeners in Hardiness Zones 3–7. Fee: \$13.95. Register: <https://pyours.com/lushflower-gardens-webinar/ref/12/>

Tues., April 4, 11:30 am: Garden Club of Hartford hosts “Designing an Ecological Park and Cultivating Biodiverse Parklands” with Rebecca McMackin, Director of Horticulture of Brooklyn Bridge Park, at Farmington Library, 6 Monteith Dr., Farmington. Register is required. Call Pat Salner, 860-604-7622, or email yogananapat@gmail.com.

Thurs. April 6, noon: West Hartford Garden Club presents “Easy Care Roses for the Home Garden” with Master Rosarian Marci Martin, Saint John’s Episcopal Church, 679 Farmington Ave., West Hartford. Ms. Martin presents a comprehensive program on how to be a successful rose grower, from planting to cutting that perfect bloom. Members free; non-members \$10. Register: www.WestHartfordGardenClub.org

Mon., April 17, 5:30 pm: Simsbury Garden Club presents “Unusual Trees of Simsbury and in the Region” with Connor Hogan, Simsbury Public Library, 725 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury. Mr. Hogan, from the Simsbury Land Trust, shares his knowledge. Free and open to the public. More information: www.simsburygardenclub.org

Wed., April 19, 2 pm: New Directions in the American Landscape presents “Kill your Lawn,” presented by Dan Jaffe Wilder, VIRTUAL only. Join ecologist, horticulturist, and author Dan Jaffe Wilder to explore alternatives; from whole lawn replacement options, to strategies for reducing lawn inputs while increasing their ecological value. \$42. Register: <https://learning.ndal.org/courses/kill-your-lawn-2023>

Fri., April 21, 1-4 pm: Hollister House Opening Day, 300 Nettleton Hollow Rd., Washington. Go to the website for events, classes and visiting hours. \$10 general admission. <https://hollisterhousegarden.org/>

Sun., April 23, 11 am – 3 pm: Arbor Earth Day Festival at Bartlett Arboretum & Gardens, 151 Brookdale Rd., Stamford. Enjoy a day of learning, growing, and celebrating nature in honor of Arbor Day & Earth Day. This is a FREE community event for all ages to have fun and learn about the natural world around us. Leashed dogs are welcome. <https://www.bartlettarboretum.org/>

Wed., April 26, 7:30pm: the Hardy Plant Society of New England-CT Chapter presents “Designing Shady Retreats” with Joan Butler, Wethersfield Academy for the Arts, 431 Wethersfield Ave., Wethersfield. Learn design tips and strategies to light up shady corners, highlight unusual plants that thrive in low-light conditions and illustrate the creative use of art objects, seating and water features. Members free; non-members \$10. Go to www.facebook.com/hardyplantsocietyconnecticut

Thurs., April 27, 9-10 am: Garden Club Info Session at the CT Flower Collective, 5 Cross St., Meriden. Are you a garden club looking to incorporate locally grown flowers into your meetings and workshops? Attend this info session to learn everything about becoming a CTFC member with access to wholesale benefits. Free to attend. Register: www.CTflowercollective.com/events



Visit cthorth.org for the MOST CURRENT listings and links.

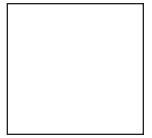


CT Hort is thrilled to be participating in

An Earth Day Celebration

Sat., April 22 from 11 am – 1 pm in West Hartford

Volunteers wanted. Browsers encouraged! Details to come at cthorth.org



Dated Material 🌿 *Please Rush*

CT Hort Calendar at a Glance

- Thurs., April 6** – Board of Directors
Remote Meeting, 7 pm
- Friday, April 14** – Deadline for our May
Newsletter
- Thurs., April 20** – Speaker presentation:
*Nibbling on Natives in
Your Back Yard and
Beyond* with Russ Cohen,
7:30 pm (In person and
on Zoom)
- Go to CTHort.org for information on these
and all other meetings and programs.

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Welcome New Members!

Joan Wikholm	Linda Chapman	Brenda Schultz	Andrew Pighills
Nancy Roberts	Leslie Krasko	Amanda Masi	Jill Benson
Nathan Loeffler	Cathy Popp	Priscilla Ramage	Portland River Valley Garden Club
Jodie Nevas	Jane Ricci	Michele Jenks	Betsy Fox
Rosemary Pilch	Moirra Snover	Mary Spalter	Trish Selby
Darcy Church	Nancy Souza	Jim Eder	Pamela Seger
Bernice Manning	Melinda Floyd	Robin Lensi	Fiona Evans
Lori Brant	Donna Kaffenberger	Bryce Burroughs	Darcy Kern
Elizabeth Berman	Jennifer Reynolds	Susan Koris	

*Join us at our April 20 meeting at Emanuel Synagogue in West Hartford,
when we honor our members celebrating special anniversaries.*

